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ABSTRACT

The program grew out of the desire of monolingual students, native bilingual students, and instructors for a class to meet the specific needs of Spanish-speaking students of Spanish. The objectives are: (1) to improve the self image of the students, (2) to increase access to the Spanish-speaking community of the world, (3) to use native bilingual skills as a springboard for expansion into written communication, (4) to increase career marketability, and (5) to learn about Hispanic culture. The program is divided into two semesters. Orthography and grammar are stressed in the first with attention given to dictations, oral drills, practice dittos, short readings, free composition, and pan-Hispanic traditional music. Throughout, language is examined as a function of culture and experience. The second semester stresses reading and writing and continues the concern for cultural knowledge and oral development. Written work is evaluated for orthographic and grammatical accuracy as well as for clarity, coherence, correctness, and creativity. Frustrations noted include the small number of students enrolled in the course, their occasionally poor study skills, and their occasional lack of self-discipline. (JK)

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THE SPANISH FOR NATIVE SPEAKERS PROGRAM AT STATE UNIVERSITY NEW YORK AT ALBANY

Wilma Feliciano

The Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) Program at SUNYA evolved from a combination of factors. Native bilinguals requested Spanish classes that would account for their skills and meet their needs more effectively than the traditional monolingual track we offered. Monolingual students complained about the fairness of having native speakers in early language classes. Instructors had difficulty coping with a few bilinguals in a class of monolinguals. As a result, we took a survey to assess the market for SNS classes by querying beginning and intermediate level instructors and perusing class lists for Spanish surname and obviously Hispanic first names like Carmen and José. Research was done on the objectives, techniques, methods of evaluation and special linguistic problems encountered by native speakers. This initial research culminated in an NEH grant to participate in a summer institute at New Mexico State University to develop a syllabus and strategies for an SNS program at each of our home campuses. The institute was under the direction of Guadalupe Valdés of NMSU and Richard Teschner, University of Texas - El Paso, pioneers in the field. In the Fall of 1978, SUNYA launched its first SNS class, which was expanded to two semesters in the Fall of 1980.

Our first decision was to decide which students should go into the SNS track. All Spanish-surname students did not necessarily speak Spanish. Language students at SUNYA are required to take the MLA Placement Examination unless they are starting a language from scratch. In contrast to non-natives, Hispanic students generally distinguished themselves by scoring higher on the listening comprehension than on the reading section. We contacted the student counselors advising them of the new course and to have them encourage native speakers to enroll. We also asked lower level instructors to make sure all their students belonged in that class because

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of placement or beginning language. Finally, we promoted the class with flyers around the school, and later, an advertisement in the student paper.

Once the native speakers where grouped into one section, it was necessary to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses. The completed an oral exam of grammatical concepts wherein they had to decide if the sentence "sounded right"; three short reading passages of graduated difficulty; a short composition based on a familiar theme; a brief in-class presentation describing themselves, their families and their career plans. This information game me an initial, albeit crude, diagnosis of how/where to focus instruction; some of the particular problems, and some idea of how to group most effectively. A native speakers class will always be highly heterogeneous. Skills will range on a continuum from passive comprehension to fairly sophisticated verbal strategies depending on the amount of Spanish spoken at home, formal study, whether or not they have lived in a Spanish-speaking country, etc. SNS students generally control an intimate, familial register of spoken Spanish. Those proficient in reading and writing went into an advanced grammar and composition course.

OBJECTIVES

The SNS program at SUNYA is designed to meet the following broad objectives:

To improve self image: Native Speakers are aware that as a group, Hispanics do not wield power and prestige in American society. Because of cultural preferences, intimate kinship ties to the "old" country or recent immigration, Hispanics have clung to their mother tongue and have resisted cultural assimilation. Furthermore, American society is not as tolerant or accepting of ethnic minorities as it was during the earlier European migratory waves. At that time the country was young and full of opportunity. There were jobs building our cities, our transportation and communication networks, our myriad of manufactured goods. However, for the last decade we have been ravaged by inflation, recession, unemployment, ethnic suspicion, or, at best, insensitivity, and a job market that has become

increasingly dependent upon high technical/professional skills. Because Hispanics are shunted to the fringes of society with the other "visible" minorities -- Blacks, Orientals, Native Americans, they tend to view themselves as an inferior class. They are self-conscious of their socio-economic and political limitations, their language, and by extension, of themselves. The SNS teacher must recognize and deal with these frustrations as an on-going aspect of the learning program.

To increase access to the Spanish-speaking community of the world: About seventy-five percent of our bilingual students are from a Puerto Rican background; the rest from other Latin-American countries. At SUNYA, linguistic instruction is focused on world-standard Spanish. But we underscore some of the linguistic/cultural differences and similarities amongst Spanish-speaking peoples. After all, Hispanic culture is not a world-wide monolithic whole. Students learn that theirs is a language spoken by 200 million people; the language of twenty-one nations; one of the official languages of the United Nations; and the second national tongue of the United States. In fact, the U.S. is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world after Mexico, Argentina, Spain and Colombia. By stressing world Spanish and the pan-Hispanic ties of religion, kinship systems and cultural perspectives, the program strives to create a spirit of togetherness and rapport that is essential to effective instruction and world-wide communication in Spanish.

To use native bilingual skills as a springboard for expansion into written communication: Linguistically, the main objective of SNS is to bridge the gap between oral/informal and written/formal language. As native speakers, they have heard, can recognize and use many more words orally than they have ever seen written. Syntax is not a major problem for most of them. Lexicon is limited but readily expandable for comprehension, if not for active production. Phonology has been so thoroughly inculcated that to attempt to manipulate it would be wastefully time-consuming. Unlike monolingual students who

generate utterances in Spanish by consciously applying sets of rules and operations, the typical SNS student depends upon the ear and an innate grammar. Often this grammar is confused or incomplete. Moreover, their notions of basic grammatical concepts are miniscule. The first time I asked them to underline the verb in a dictation passage, they came up with "casa," "de," "entonces," etc. It is necessary to teach these structures in order to refer to them efficiently, but technical jargon is kept to a minimum. Without a doubt, the most persistent problem is orthography. Throughout the year we work on r/l reversals, aspirated final /s/, similarity of b/v, accents, interference from English orthography, etc.

To increase career marketability: Because of the importance and proliferation of Spanish on the world stage, students learn to appreciate the vast career potential for persons who combine solid professional training in a specific area with formal Spanish as an adjunct skill. Spanish is the language in most demand by American commerce for its international trade. It is vital to the security, prestige, diplomatic and military interests of the nation. In 1976, the U.S. Office of Education-Olympus Research Project, Languages for the World of Work, concluded that "it is safe to suppose that more than 150,000 employee positions require some foreign language proficiency." + With linguistic competence and professional ability, native bilinguals can compete favorably for these positions.

To learn about Hispanic culture: The reading text, Aquí Mismo, (Scholberg and Scholberg, Newbury House, 1980), was chosen because it concentrates exclusively on the lifestyles, manifestations and contributions of Hispanic culture in the United States. While exploring the Hispanic experience in print and through recordings, we contrast it to their own values, attitudes and experiences -- as well as to Anglo-American culture. The first week we read and discuss the article on Hispanic-Americans in TIME Magazine, October 16, 1978. Yet, lest they become unbearably chauvinistic, I stress that cultures are neither better nor worse -- merely different.

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METHODOLOGY

In the Fall of 1980, SNS was expanded to two semesters. During the first, the class concentrates on the mechanics of orthography and grammar. It is more controlled than the second, which emphasizes reading and writing. The first week of class the students get the SNS Packet containing:

1."El Calendario de Clase" This lists, in chronological order, class topics, home assignments, exam dates; what is to be collected, group checked, presented orally. The "calendario" gives students an overview of the term; lets them keep up when they miss class; avoids my forgetting to put assignments on board and having them say, "I didn't hear you say that," and helps me to keep the pace brisk.

2. Course outline describing the objectives, methods of instruction and evaluation; my expectations concerning class and homework, lateness, absence; breakdown of final averages.

3. Outline: "How to Write a Composition"

4. Questionnaire: Why are you taking this class? When/with whom/ how often they speak Spanish? When/where/for how long did you study Spanish? Self-assessment of four language skills in Spanish and English on a scale of one to six. Most of the answers are as expected. I'm no longer surprised when a student assesses him/herself "4" (intermediate) in English reading and/or writing. Because they are college students, I would have expected "6" (educated native), but their skills are underdeveloped -- and they realize it.

While this packet takes alot of time to prepare, it is invaluable. It lets me structure the class more cohesively and coherently; provides goals and milestones; frees me from what to teach in order to concentrate on how to teach it best.

During the first term, every class and every exam begin with a dictation. It is a very flexible way to introduce concepts, teach sound/letter correspondances and syntactical constraints. Since the first major focus is orthography, we begin with the sounds of vowels, diphthongs, problem consonants, syllable division, accents. These mechanical concepts are presented in a dictation, underlined, the rules extrapolated and followed with many practice dittos and oral drills, short readings and records.

The use of pan-Hispanic traditional music has been particularly beneficial during the early part of the term. I use it for sound/letter correspondances, to highlight accents, introduce abstractions such as verb tense and agreement, and for cultural analysis. As they listen to familiar songs, they read the lyrics from songsheets previously prepared. Follow-up assignments include: spelling (find all words that end in "-dad, -tud" because it is a common error to drop the final /d/); accented rhyming words (frío, mío, río); verb tenses, fillins, matching, supply the infinitive/root word, etc. The students enjoy listening to the music. It varies class routines; exposes them to other voices and linguistic varieties, and helps to affirm that the SNS class is not like other Spanish classes they may have had.

The basic text for both semesters is Español escrito (Valdés and Teschner, Charles Scribner, 1978). Our initial reading lessons follow the pattern of the text. We do extensive word-attack skills: roots, prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, antonyms, key phrases, unfamiliar words in context, sentences that are semantically alike or different wherein the difference hinges on one or two words. We practice identifying the main idea and supporting details of paragraphs of graduated length and complexity. We also have content questions to check for reading comprehension. Reading skills are developed and practiced to a greater extent during the second semester.

As previously mentioned, grammatical terminology and notions are fuzzy and incomplete. Grammatical ideas are related to the structure of the language. To help them distinguish between verbs and nouns, we do exercises that use the same word as both, eg: "Abrazo: Dame un abrazo. Abrazo a mi madre." We cover the present indicative, gustar and like verbs, imperfect and preterit (when to use each is not a problem, but spelling of preterit forms is), gender, articles, adjectives (plural agreement is spotty due to aspirated final /s/), ser vs. hacer (a common confusion), esta/ésta/está (always a problem), personal a (another perrenial problem). These ideas are introduced in a

dictation, reading or record, isolated and identifyied, rules extrapolated, expanded and practiced extensively with dittos. Unfortunately, even after the second semester, may of these notions remain fuzzy and application inconsistent.

First term writing projects are short and highly controlled. In addition to dictations, they write sentences employing particular sounds, vocabulary, grammar, accents and "correciones de pruebas. We also do number, gender and temporal conversions and written exercises from Español escrito. Free composition is short and based on a very familiar topic: "Mis dos idiomas," "Diferencias culturales entre X y Z," "El problema del licor y las drogas en la universidad," "La pobreza," "La vida social en Albany," etc. In order to have them practice the formal usted form, they write short situational dialogues wherein the situation, characters and conflict are given. They must supply the language. All writing assignments are marked "A" "B" or "Rewrite."

First-term culture usually revolves around language, bilingualism, linguistic registers, regional varieties and the relationship between language and culture. The aim is to examine their language as a function of their culture and experience. The very first assignment is a reading from Español escrito, "Do we all speak bad Spanish?" We explore the varieties of Hispanic culture in our own class, their own values, and differences with Anglo-American culture. During the second term, culture becomes the central theme because the reader, Aquí Mismo is totally dedicated to Hispanic-Americans.

The second semester starts with a review of the mechanics of orthography, agreement and verb tenses studied. During this term, reading, writing, culture and oral development are incorporated into learning activities packages (LAPs) for units in Aquí Mismo. Before we start on the LAPs, they must be trained in how to use the LAP as a map of the unit, follow instructions and work indepently and in groups. Each LAP unit contains: two to four short reading passages based on a central theme, comprehension questions, vocabulary expansion, structural exercises,

conversational and writing topics. Students are grouped based on ability, but the grouping is flexible and fluid. Sometimes I have a better student work with a poorer one. Not only does this reinforce concepts for the better one, but it allows the slower one more time, individual attention and a fresh explanation or strategy to master the task. All work is group checked except for original written work, which is collected and graded. During LAP work, I move from group to group spot checking, helping individuals and listening to the conversation which we do as a "discusión." Students are expected to prepare one topic for "discusión" for each LAP, and be prepared to defend or explain their statements. However, this has been a sore spot. Consistently, many of them flip through the unit and ad-lib their comments and opinions. Only the exceptional student actually prepares oral presentations before class. The resultant problem for the others is that they code-switch repeatedly between English and Spanish as they come to an idea they cannot readily express in Spanish.

We do three units ("La gente hispana," "Cuatro cuidades latinas," "Lengua y bilinguismo") systematically in class so that students understand how to handle the LAPs. In addition, I feel that these units are basic to understanding themselves and their place in the larger Hispanic-American society. After the basic units, they choose three, four or five additional units depending on their own interests and on the final grade toward which they are working: "C," "B," "A," respectively. These are corrected by having students who have worked on the same unit group check their work. Or, as sometimes happens, if only one has worked on a unit, s/he shows it to me for rapid correction of the exercises.

Group correction and LAP work usually occurs during the second half of the class period. Initially, we cover new material in Español escrito, more tenses, writing assignments, formal business letters. In addition to technical competence -- orthography and grammar, the aim of written work is to strive toward the "High C's": clarity, coherence, correctness and creativity.

In conclusion, I would like to address some of the frustrations encountered in three years of teaching SNS at SUNYA. Despite the fact that Hispanic students requested a Spanish class specifically for them, the registration has been disappointing. We have averaged thirteen students per semester, but have not been able to increase this figure despite an undergraduate Hispanic-student population of around 200. SNS is perceived as harder than the monolingual track. And, it definitely is! The time is short and the topics many. In thirty weeks it's very difficult to modify linguistic habits developed over a lifetime. The "calendario" means no one is excused from anything. Yet the socially-stigmatized vernacular persists. It's disheartening to have another instructor ask what was accomplished in the SNS class because a former student still makes spelling errors.

As a large public university, the native bilingual student we serve, is most likely to be a lower classman from a New York City school. In general, their study skills are poor. Many have not mastered the arts of effective listening, following directions, time management, task accountability and rigorous self-discipline. Absence and lateness are perpetual problems despite punitive measures adopted in an attempt to curtail them. The lack of university-level study skills and self-discipline are not handicaps for every SNS student. Nevertheless, it is a greater problem than with monolingual students.

While the causes and reasons for this scholastic inadequacy are evident in our society, the fact remains that when students cut classes and come in late or unprepared, they are not deriving the maximum benefit from their education. The paradox is that they are repeatedly affirming their language loyalty to their mother tongue and their goal of upward mobility. They express a desire to expand their bilingualism, learn more about their culture and increase their career potential. The difficulty lies in channelling this verbal motivation into realized milestones and goals.

Despite the frustrations, every semester has its successes. Several students have become Spanish majors or second majors. A few have put their pen to writing short poems. Three have travelled individually to Spain, Mexico and Argentina and said they felt more confident about their language because they had previously completed the SNS course. Many students confess to being surprised and delighted at the diversity and richness of Hispanic-American culture. Our classes are small and there is a constant exchange of ideas and attitudes which promote feelings of camaraderie and ethnic solidarity. This is easy to encourage because we have shared similar backgrounds and handicaps. Like me, most students spoke Spanish before English, went on to receive their formal education in English and had never expanded beyond a sub-standard variety of their native tongue. Luckily, language admits to being highly expansive and creative. It's exciting to guide them toward the conquest of their limitations; it's crushing when progress is stymied. My strong identification with my SNS students means that the successes are doubly rewarding and the limits doubly disappointing. Yet despite the frustrations, I'm confident that w with patience, guidance and determination, the SNS student of today will become the bilingual professional that America needs tomorrow.